

THE TRAUMA OF MOO GOO GAI PAN

Of all my childhood memories, the ones that really stick fascinate me. One of my most vivid recollections revolved around my family's weekly Sunday night ritual of eating Chinese food. Most of the time we ordered takeout and I often went with my dad to pick up the food. It was a short drive down South Oyster Bay Road to China View. I never minded going with him as long as we didn't have to actually sit down and eat. Eating at a Chinese restaurant had become a rather traumatic affair for me. One might wonder what hidden horrors exist at the local Chinese restaurant. Believe me, you'd be surprised.



One night my parents decided to take us all out to dinner for the first time at a fancy new Chinese restaurant called Dragon Sky. I must have been about 4-years old. Mom wanted us all to have good manners, so she taught us how to tuck our napkins in our laps, how to use the right utensils for the right job, and

how to keep our screaming to a minimum. I was a real people-pleaser, so I wanted to do the right thing. So I learned how to tuck my napkin in my lap, use the right utensils, and not scream in public.



We always ordered the same thing every week: Wonton Soup with “extra crunchies,” (aka fried noodles), Shrimp in Lobster Sauce, Moo Goo Gai Pan, Spare Ribs, Egg Rolls, Fried Rice, and Roast Pork. Needless to say, we didn’t keep kosher. We were in the middle of our Moo Goo Gai Pan when I realized I really had to go pee. I politely rose from the table and tried to dash off to the ladies room. What followed me, to my surprise and horror, were the Wonton Soup, Shrimp in Lobster Sauce, Moo Goo Gai Pan, Spare Ribs, Egg Rolls, Fried Rice, and Roast Pork. I had tucked the tablecloth, not my napkin, into my favorite striped capri pants. Unlike a magician who could yank the tablecloth out from underneath every plate, I took it all with me.



Two waiters came rushing over and started picking up the shattered plates. My brothers broke into hysterics, so I made a beeline for the bathroom and proceeded to cry for what seemed like an eternity. My cheeks felt like they were on fire from embarrassment. Mom tried to comfort me, but I could sense she was fighting back her own laughter. This story became part of our too-oft repeated family lore. My brothers were kind enough to share it with all the neighborhood kids so that my humiliation was extended beyond the family circle. To this day, I have a lot of issues with napkins.